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REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE FOR PROGRAMME MATTERS ON ITS IN-SESSIONAL MEETING HELD DURING THE THIRTY-NINTH SESSION OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL, 4-29 MAY 1992

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Addendum

CHAPTER VII. EVALUATION

Evaluation

1. The Director of the Central Evaluation Office (CEO) introduced the report of the Administrator on Evaluation (DP/1992/20). This report gives a review of the CEO over the last five years, and of its main activities relating to the issuing of guidelines on monitoring and evaluation, the establishment of a computerized institutional memory for feedback purposes, and the strengthening of national monitoring and evaluation capacity. In addition it describes the feedback of evaluation results into the work of UNDP and sets out the 1992-1993 workplan of the CEO.

2. The Director also described the future priorities of the Office in focusing on: (a) programme evaluations (national, regional or thematic); (b) strategic evaluations relating to UNDP's overall performance in the six areas of concentration, and certain areas of the Special Programme Resources programme; and (c) policy evaluations, relating, for example, to strengthening national capacity in support of human development. All the above would be instruments for improving the feedback from the lessons learned.

3. All delegations commended the quality of the report and appreciated the efforts of the CEO to respond to the suggestions made by the Council at its thirty-eighth session. One delegation expressed its satisfaction that evaluation was being taken so seriously, and that the 1992-1993 workplan would cover a full range of activities. However, another delegation recognized that while there was little doubt about the need for evaluation, in practice it was rare for the lessons of such evaluations to be systematically followed up. This seemed to suggest two questions: the need to pay more attention to feedback, and the need to stress national capacity-building so as to strengthen awareness of the needs and implications of corrective measures, and the choice of alternative solutions.

4. With regard to current activities, some delegations expressed their support for the establishment of evaluation guidelines for current UNDP initiatives, viz. programme approach and national execution, as well as for the evaluation of thematic areas of concern. However, one delegation questioned the results given in paragraph 44 on the quality of projects and evaluations, implying that the methodology might need to be amplified so as projects could be evaluated in terms of their actual or expected sustainability of impact and results, and not just in terms of design and performance.

5. Concerning the subject of feedback from lessons learned, several delegations stressed its importance for improving programme and project quality. Most delegations welcomed the initiative shown by CEO in launching a study on the current feedback system, and one delegation expressed its interest in actively participating in the exercise. Some delegations appreciated the objectivity and relevance of recommendations emerging from the different evaluations carried out by CEO, and asked to what extent those recommendations were used for feedback purposes. Several delegations recommended that UNDP should make more use of ex-post evaluations as a means of assessing the impact and sustainability of the results of its technical cooperation programme.

6. With regard to future priorities, most delegations emphasized the need to strengthen the national capacity of recipient countries in monitoring and evaluation in order to assist national officials and beneficiaries in effectively taking stock of lessons learned in the development process of their countries. Some delegations expressed support for UNDP efforts to assist developing countries through country monographs, study tours and training courses.

7. One delegation endorsed CEO's initial steps towards focusing its evaluation activities so as to cover gender issues and environmental concerns as well. The same delegation stressed the need to examine cost-effectiveness in project evaluations, and to carry out many more ex-post evaluations, in order to assess the longer term impact of UNDP activities. Another delegation suggested that tripartite reviews be expanded to include beneficiaries. Furthermore, the suggestion was made by one delegation that future guidelines on the programme approach should involve an updating of guidelines on monitoring and evaluation, so that the programme dimension could be taken into full consideration.

8. While participants supported the CEO workplan for the biennium 1992-1993, some expressed the view that it seemed to be unduly ambitious as well as fragmented, and should therefore be revised. Some participants welcomed the inclusion in the work programme of the initiatives related to joint and participatory evaluations, and encouraged CEO to continue to promote the use of national consultants in evaluation activities.

9. It was noted that current levels of CEO staff resources might be a major constraint in carrying out the workplan. Several delegations therefore recommended that CEO be strengthened to enable it to carry out its increasingly heavy responsibilities.

10. With regard to future priorities, several delegations supported CEO's proposal that it should develop its evaluation activities at programme (including country programmes), strategy and policy levels. One delegation stressed the need for impact evaluation at the programme level, and for attention to be given at the outset to developing baseline data and performance indicators for such evaluations.

11. It was noted that CEO had also scheduled 50 ex-post evaluations (thematic, sectoral and cluster) with resources provided by SPR funding; eight such evaluations were planned in the current biennium. Delegations also expressed their support for the demand-driven approach used by CEO and suggested that it should not be limited to UNDP only, but should also be used to satisfy recipient countries' demands. The exercises in question would provide an assessment of impact and sustainability.

12. The Director of the Central Evaluation Office responded to the comments made, and expressed his gratitude for the interest and support shown for the work of CEO. He took note of the points made and promised to follow up them as appropriate.

13. He noted with satisfaction that UNDP was playing an important role in evaluation, and in developing ideas and methodologies for learning from and feeding back experience. Its role in those respects was recognized by Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members and recipient countries, as evidenced by the special responsibility assigned to CEO in following up the outcome of the recently sponsored regional seminar on performance evaluation in Asia and the Pacific. All these efforts have strengthened CEO's relationships with evaluation authorities.

14. The Standing Committee took note of the Administrator's report and endorsed a draft decision on evaluation submitted by the Nordic countries to the Governing Council at its present session for its approval.